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Lucia A Keegan 01/24/2007 09:43:29 AM From DB/Inbox: Lucia A Keegan

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FROM USMISSION UNESCO PARIS

E.O. 12598: N/A
TAGS: UNESCO SCUL SOCI SMIG
SUBJECT: UNESCO: AFRICAN MIGRATION MEETING WITH ADG PIERRE SANE

¶1. An informal consultative meeting was held Wednesday, 17 January 2007 at UNESCO to discuss the issue of African Migration, in connection with the Executive Board resolution number 57, initially put forward by Senegal.

¶2. The meeting chaired by Pierre Sane, UNESCO's Assistant Director General (ADG) for Social and Human Sciences, was well attended, despite many delegations, including the US, having been informed only the previous afternoon about the meeting. There were, however, a surprisingly small number of African ambassadors present, despite the fact that the subject is of great importance to most of their countries.

¶3. Sane said that the meeting's principal objective was to solicit the initial, non-binding views of member states on what UNESCO can do to meet the challenges of African migration and development, before he reports to the Director General by the end of January. His stated objective was quickly sent off track when various member states broadened the topic to include the wider subject of migration in general.

¶4. Various representatives, including several European ambassadors, spoke at length describing the problems associated with illegal immigration in their countries, including vocational training and remittances. One member state, India, asked for a study about the beneficial side of immigration.

¶5. Several delegations also suggested various sorts of studies to determine who the potential migrants are, what their motivations are for seeking to leave their countries, and what kind of assistance (financial, training, education) would convince them to stay.

¶6. The US delegation intervened to suggest that before the working group got too far ahead of itself, it would be extremely important to determine what other UN and non-UN international organizations are already doing regarding African migration issues. The US urged that every effort be made to avoid duplication and to limit UNESCO's involvement to "value-added" that UNESCO could uniquely bring to the subject.

¶ 7. Pierre Sane, made several remarks at the close of the meeting, which provided a very sobering and informative perspective of the realities of African migration today, shattering several widely-held assumptions that most African migrants are uneducated, illegal boat people seeking a new "El-Dorado". Sane said that in fact, 90 percent of immigrants today are legal immigrants. Regarding African immigration in particular, Sane said that 60 percent of all immigration is intra-African migration, where people are moving to different countries but staying within a more comfortable cultural context. He said that many are well educated, coming from large cities, and have very clear understandings of the difficult living conditions and economic realities they will encounter when and if they arrive in another country, as many have friends and family already in place who have provided them with detailed reports of what to expect.

¶ 8. Sane said that despite the problems they know they will face, the economic realities of poverty and lack of opportunities in their own countries push many young people to risk the dangers of migration.

¶ 9. Sane's comments would have been extremely useful, in retrospect, had they come at the start of the meeting so that delegations could have taken them into account in formulating their proposals, some of which now seem off-mark. (Comment: For example, several representatives had suggested stronger communication campaigns and educational programs to let people know of that the roads are not paved with gold in other countries; of the serious problems of abuse, poor living conditions, etc. that they could encounter. End comment.)

¶ 10. Comment: It seemed that Sane was surprised that some of the African delegates, with the exception of the Senegalese ambassador, were not aware that the original topic had been enlarged to cover African migration in general, and was not limited to illegal migration. Given the interventions of non-African delegates aimed at opening the discussions in a more general way on migration issues, Sane will likely need to consider next steps that will keep further discussion of this subject more tightly focused on the scope of the resolution adopted - African migration and development. End comment.

OLIVER